

Step up pressure on Taliban

Afghanistan's Ghani urges Biden as 8 security personnel killed in blast

AFP, Washington

Afghanistan's President Ashraf Ghani urged the new US administration Friday to step up pressure on the Taliban and not rush to withdraw more troops.

Ghani said the Taliban have failed to live up to conditions agreed in their February 2020 deal with the United States to reduce attacks in Afghanistan and sever longstanding ties to Al-Qaeda.

"The United States and Nato must take a very strong stand on the conditions-based approach," Ghani said in an online address to the Aspen Security Forum.

"They signed an agreement; that agreement now needs to be implemented."

Even though Taliban and Afghan government negotiators opened peace talks in Doha last year, violence in Afghanistan has soared.

Ghani said the Taliban must admit to attacking government forces and conducting a string of assassinations of public figures.

The Taliban exploited former president Donald Trump's rush to pull US forces from Afghanistan to continue attacking government forces, Ghani suggested.

Meanwhile, a suicide bomber drove a vehicle loaded with explosives into a base for Afghan defence forces in the country's east yesterday, killing at least eight security personnel in an attack claimed by the Taliban.

The pre-dawn assault took place in the restive province of Nangarhar where the Taliban have claimed several deadly assaults targeting government forces.



Activists hold a banner reading "Stop Europe's isolation!" during a protest to demand support for migrants who live in makeshift camps in Bosnian woods near the border with Croatia, in Berlin, Germany yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

NEWS IN BRIEF

Japan woman hid mum's frozen corpse for 10 yrs

A Japanese woman who said she hid her mother's corpse in a freezer in her apartment for a decade told police she feared eviction if the death was discovered, media reported yesterday. Police told AFP that Yumi Yoshino, 48, was held "on suspicion of abandoning and hiding a female body" found Wednesday in a freezer in a Tokyo apartment. Yoshino said after finding her mother dead 10 years ago, she hid the body because she "didn't want to move out" of the home they shared, local media reported, citing unnamed police sources. The mother, thought to have been aged around 60 at the time of her death, was named on the lease of the apartment in a municipal housing complex, Kyodo News said. Yoshino had been forced to leave the apartment in mid-January after missing rent payments, according to the reports, and a cleaner then discovered the body in a freezer hidden in a closet.

Black Lives Matter proposed for Nobel Peace Prize

Black Lives Matter, a movement which became a rallying cry after the killing by US police of an unarmed black man, has been proposed for the Nobel Peace Prize, a Norwegian MP said yesterday. Founded in the United States in 2013, the movement received an impetus in May after George



Floyd died. A white policeman had knelt on Floyd's neck for eight minutes ignoring Floyd's pleas that he couldn't breathe. The incident fuelled protests in the United States that spread across the world. "This movement has become one of the strongest global movements for working with racial injustice," Petter Eide, a socialist lawmaker who proposed BLM for the Peace Prize, told AFP.

Bird flu behind mass pelican deaths in Senegal

Scientific analysis has shown that bird flu killed at least 750 pelicans found dead last week in Senegal's Djoudj bird sanctuary, after authorities had initially ruled out the disease. The birds -- 740 juveniles and 10 adults -- were discovered in the Djoudj National Bird Sanctuary on January 23, and the environment ministry said on Wednesday it had been closed to the public. Now "we have the results of the analysis. It is indeed bird flu type A H5N1," national parks director Bocar Thiam told AFP. Environment Minister Karim Sall confirmed the bird flu diagnosis to RFM radio. A mixture of wetlands, savannah, canals, marshes and lakes nestled in the Senegal river delta, Djoudj harbours more than three million individual birds from almost 400 species.

SOURCE: AFP, REUTERS

Repairing US democracy key to China rivalry: Biden aide

AFP, Washington

President Joe Biden will impose costs on China but also work to repair democracy at home in a bid to win the emerging rivalry between the world's top two economies, a top aide said Friday.

Jake Sullivan, the national security advisor, said that the new administration's strategy included renewing alliances and robust investment in technology to ensure the United States retains a critical edge.

In a veiled reference to defeated president Donald Trump, whose baseless allegations of election fraud culminated in a mob attack on the US Capitol, Sullivan said that China was becoming more explicit in contending that it had a better model.

"They're pointing to dysfunction and division in the United States and saying -- take a look at that, their system doesn't work, our



system does," Sullivan said at the US Institute of Peace.

"So step one," he said, "is to refurbish the fundamental foundation of our democracy."

"And that goes for everything from our democratic system itself to issues of racial inequity to issues of economic inequality -- all the things that have contributed to the shine coming off the American model."

The Biden administration has indicated that it will maintain Trump's tough line on China, in substance if not always in tone, on

issues from trade to human rights -- including what the United States has described as genocide against the mostly Muslim Uighur people in the western Xinjiang region.

Sullivan said the administration will "impose costs for what China is doing in Xinjiang, what it's doing in Hong Kong, for the bellicosity and threats that it is projecting towards Taiwan."

"With our allies and partners in both Europe and Asia, we represent well more than half of the world's economy, Sullivan said.

Trump's last national security advisor Robert O'Brien, speaking at the same event, said the Biden administration was "off to a great start on China."

Sullivan said that the Biden administration would also heavily promote research in areas including artificial intelligence, quantum computing, biotechnology and clean energy.

'Miracle' escape for man trapped in Alps avalanche

AFP, Grenoble

A man out walking with his family in the French Alps has made a miraculous escape from an avalanche after spending more than two and a half hours trapped under snow, rescuers said.

The 50-year-old father was snowshoeing near the high-altitude Val d'Isere ski resort with his wife and two children on Thursday without anti-avalanche safety equipment.

"Thank to the mobilisation of nearly 100 people... the man was found alive after two hours and 40 minutes of searching," the police for the local Savoie region announced on Twitter.

Because of the depth of the snow, rescue dogs were unable to detect a trace, but the man was eventually dug out by a specialised mountain police team which used a Wolfhound device to locate his mobile phone under the ice.

"I think it's a miracle," Alexandre Grether from the PGHM rescue team told the France 3 local news channel, adding that the man was found 2.5 metres (eight feet) below the surface.

The chances of survival after more than 20 minutes in an avalanche are usually slim.

"He was protected by a tree, that's what prevented him from being crushed by all the ice that slid down. The snow had surrounded him, but he had a pocket of air," he explained.

The victim is expected to make a full recovery after suffering a fracture to his hip.

The avalanche risk on Thursday was at its maximum -- five on a scale of five -- and rescuers urge tourists to always check the snow conditions before venturing out.



Members of the World Health Organisation (WHO) tasked with investigating the origins of the coronavirus disease pandemic visit an exhibition on how China fought the coronavirus in Wuhan, Hubei province, China, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Repatriate 27,000 kids from Syria camp

UN counterterrorism chief urges countries

ALJAZEERA ONLINE

The United Nations counterterrorism chief urged countries to repatriate the 27,000 children stranded in a huge camp in northeastern Syria, many of them sons and daughters of ISIL (ISIS) fighters who once controlled large swathes of Iraq and Syria.

Vladimir Voronkov told an informal meeting of the UN Security Council on Friday that "the horrific situation of the children in al-Hol [camp] is one of the most pressing issues in the world today."

The 27,000 children "remain stranded, abandoned to their fate", vulnerable to be preyed on by ISIL enforcers, "and at risk of radicalisation within the camp", he said.

Al-Hol, the largest camp for refugees and displaced Syrians in the country, is currently home to almost 62,000 residents, according to UN humanitarian officials.

More than 80 percent are women

and children, many who fled there after ISIL fighters lost their last Syrian stronghold in 2019. There are a number of other camps in the northeast as well.



Voronkov said there are children from 60 countries in the camps who are the responsibility of their member states, not of Syria or the groups that control the camps.

Kurdish fighters are guarding al-Hol and other camps, as well as thousands of ISIL fighters.

Voronkov said a number of countries -- including Russia and Kazakhstan that convened the

virtual meeting -- "have collectively repatriated nearly 1,000 children and their family members".

The experiences of the returnees are being compiled "and what we see thus far is that fears of security risks have been unfounded", he said.

The executive director of the UN Counter-terrorism Center stressed that children "must be treated primarily as victims" and youngsters should not be detained or prosecuted.

History has shown that children are resilient and can recover from violent experiences if they are supported in reintegrating into communities, Voronkov said.

"Every effort should be made to ensure children are not kept in institutions but allowed to reintegrate with family members within their communities," he said.

Virginia Gamba, the UN special representative for children and armed conflict, echoed Voronkov's call that they be treated "primarily as victims, not as security threats."

UAE to offer citizenship to select expats

AFP, Dubai

The UAE announced Saturday it is opening a path to citizenship for select foreigners, in a rare move for the Gulf where the status and its welfare benefits are jealously guarded.

UAE Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al-Maktoum said "investors, specialised talents and professionals including scientists, doctors, engineers, artists, authors and their families" would be eligible for naturalisation under the new amendment.

"The UAE cabinet, local emiri courts and executive councils will nominate those eligible for the citizenship," Sheikh Mohammed said.

India reports lowest active number of Covid cases

REUTERS, Mumbai

India reported its lowest active number of novel coronavirus cases in seven months yesterday, a year after the virus was first confirmed in the country.

A year ago, a student from Kerala tested positive for COVID-19 after returning to India from Wuhan in China, the global epicentre of the virus.

To arrest the spread of the virus, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government imposed a nationwide lockdown on the 1.3 billion population in late March.

The lockdown crippled India's economy, which is set to contract 7.7% in the current fiscal year to March 31.

CONFRONTATION WITH GOP LAWMAKER

US House Democrat to move office citing safety reasons

REUTERS, Washington

In the latest sign of rising tensions within the US Congress, a Democratic congresswoman said on Friday she plans to relocate her Capitol Hill office for safety reasons after being "berated" by an outspoken conservative Republican congresswoman.

Democrat Cori Bush, an ordained pastor from Missouri, described confrontations with Republican Marjorie Taylor Greene of Georgia, whose office is located near Bush's in one of the three large House of Representatives office buildings. Both are first-term House members who took office this month.

The incidents are further evidence of discord among lawmakers after a Jan. 6 riot in which supporters of Republican former President Donald Trump stormed the Capitol, interrupting the formal certification of President Joe Biden's

election victory and leading to the deaths of five people.

Bush wrote on Twitter that she is moving her office after Greene "berated me in a hallway" and "came up from behind me, loud and unmasked." Public health experts have recommended masks to help curb the spread of Covid-19.

"What I cannot do is continue to look over my shoulder wondering if a white supremacist in Congress by the name of Marjorie Taylor Greene or anyone else -- because there are others -- that they are doing something or conspiring against us," Bush

told MSNBC.

Meanwhile, US law enforcement agents found bomb-making instructions inside the home of a member of the Proud Boys right-wing extremist group who was charged with participating in the January 6 siege of the Capitol, prosecutors said on Friday.



Children wear face masks as a preventive measure against the spread of the coronavirus, as they attend a class at the Paul Valery French School in Yumbo, Valle del Cauca department, Colombia, on Friday.

PHOTO: AFP